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ABSTRACT

Oklahoma's work study program for handicapped high school students, a cooperative effort between public schools and the State Departments of Education and Human Services, is described. Responsibilities of each party are discussed, and basic training elements (adjustment training, career awareness, and employer-employee relations) are noted. Results of annual evaluations are cited, including the program's strengths (such as cooperation among personnel and increased availability of training sites). The added component of a summer program is described as an approach to ease the transition from one school year to the next. In addition, the cooperation among vocational rehabilitation, vocational technical education, and special education has resulted in such further programs as a network of vocational evaluation centers and shared funding arrangements for interpreters for the deaf at two state postsecondary schools. Informal followup data are cited to demonstrate program effectiveness. (CL)

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O K L A H O M A

SPECIAL EDUCATION - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

COOPERATIVE WORK-STUDY

PROGRAM

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The Oklahoma Special Education-Vocational Rehabilitation Cooperative Work-Study Program started in March 1961 as a pilot program at Central High School in Oklahoma City. Oklahoma was the first state to have this cooperative program, and because of its success and the publicity it received nationally, almost every state in the nation now has similar programs.

This pilot program in Central High School began with 40 mentally retarded students enrolled. Through the years these programs have grown steadily, and last year, FY 1981, there were 63 high schools across Oklahoma with Work-Study Programs. Not only are the mentally retarded served in this cooperative endeavor, but there are also work-study programs for learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, deaf and hearing impaired, and physically and/or multi-handicapped students. More than 2000 high school handicapped students were served last year, and more than 2500 graduates from these high school programs were served during the year.

The program is a cooperative effort between the public school system, the Special Education Section of the State Department of Education and the Rehabilitative Services Division of the Department of Human Services. Essentially the Special Education-Vocational Rehabilitation Cooperative program is a school-work experience. The criteria used in selecting handicapped children to participate in the program are 1) students placed in special education classes according to State and Federal guidelines established for education, and 2) eligible for vocational rehabilitation according to State and Federal guidelines established for vocational rehabilitation. The student/client attends special classes part of the day and works and/or participates in vocational training or on-the-job training the remainder of the day.

The participating school district hires and assigns the teacher-coordinator to the program. The teacher-coordinator spends a portion of the school day teaching special-education classes. The other part of the day is spent in securing jobs, supervising students on the job, making home visits and providing evaluations to aid in further planning for each student - this portion of the day is under the supervision of vocational rehabilitation personnel, and travel expenses for these activities are reimbursed by vocational rehabilitation.

The Rehabilitative Services hires and assigns a vocational rehabilitation counselor to the program. The counselor provides diagnostic and vocational evaluation services, medical services, vocational training, counseling and other support services as needed. The teacher and counselor work as a team, coordinating their efforts to provide maximum benefit to the students. Through collaboration in the development of the IEP and the IWRP for mutual student-clients, duplication of services is prevented.

Basic training for the student/client includes adjustment training, performing tasks within his capabilities in the classroom and at his training station, studying employer-employee relations and various characteristics of numerous jobs so he can gain some understanding of the requirements of each. Goodwill Industries and other workshops, area vo-tech schools and projects with industry have all helped in the basic training needs of these students. All areas of employment are utilized for job placement if the position is feasible and compatible with the disability.

Annual reviews for the sixty-three Cooperative Work-Study Programs in the participating high schools were completed for FY 1981. The review team was composed of Vocational Rehabilitation, Special Education and Local School personnel.

Since cooperative work-study programs are initiated in order to better serve the handicapped student, it is believed that an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the program is vital in keeping the services current and up-to-date. Also Federal regulations mandate these reviews and school policy as well as Vocational Rehabilitation agency policy needs to be periodically reviewed and new or revised policies shared with one another for clearer understanding and better coordination; therefore, these reviews are done each year in all school systems.

The major objective of the yearly evaluation is to aid in making a good program even better. The strengths and needs of the programs have therefore been noted on the evaluation forms with recommendations for changes made in reference to the ideas and comments that would help to build a stronger program. The statistical information gives a composite view of the overall program as revealed by the reports from the review team. Each participant is able to view the program in a slightly different perspective and thereby a more comprehensive evaluation of the entire cooperative endeavor is obtained.

Overall the Cooperative Work-Study Programs were adequately serving the needs of the handicapped students in the participating schools. The major strength of the programs continues to be the excellent cooperation among Teacher Coordinators, School Administrators, RS Counselors and other personnel involved in planning an individualized program of services that satisfies both the vocational and educational goals for these special students. The availability of vocational training for the handicapped continues to increase through on-the-job training, training classes in the Area Vocational and Technical schools and pre-vocational skills training in sheltered workshops.

The combined effort of the State Department of Education, the Division

of Rehabilitative and Visual Services of the Department of Human Services and the local school district is needed to develop a total program of service that will enable all of the clients to enter the world of work in gainful employment that is commensurate with their ability and compatible with their disability. From the FY 1981 evaluations which show that the part-time earnings for these students was over a million dollars, it appears that this is being done in an effective way in Oklahoma.

In addition to the Work-Study Program established for the regular school year, a summer program was started in 1970 to help bridge the gap for these students from one school year to the next. This summer program is sponsored by Vocational-Technical Education, Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation. Vo-Tech funds pay for 50% of teachers salaries, Vocational Rehabilitation funds pay for the additional 50% of the teachers salaries plus their travel expenses, and Special Education provides for a two-day in-service training workshop for all staff involved in the program. Through this cooperative effort among agencies, stronger linkages have been developed and coordination of services strengthened as each one works toward reaching a common goal which is the occupational preparation of handicapped individuals.

Sixty-two part- and full-time teachers were hired for the 1981 Summer Program. All teachers were involved with student-client counseling, job placement, job follow-up, home visits, parent conferences, community canvassing for new training and/or employment opportunities, employer conferences, and contact with incoming junior high students and parents. Also, on an individual basis, some of the summer personnel worked with other Rehabilitative services clients who have physical handicaps. This is a broadening experience for the summer personnel in many respects. Some of the teachers visited support facilities for professional growth, ideas and material.

The past few school terms have proven the envisioned benefits of the summer program. Very positive reactions have been received from school personnel, business men, and Vocational Rehabilitation staff. A far better understanding of the various services available has developed. Rehabilitative Services rules and regulations are better understood as they relate to individual clients and to available services. The summer program has helped to further bridge the gap between school and employment.

Other cooperative programs which have come about through the years as a direct result of close working relationships among the three principle agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation - Vocational Technical Education - Special Education, are as follows:

1. Twelve Vocational Evaluation Centers were established throughout the State through the cooperative efforts of VR and Vo-Tech working together. VR secured the buildings, renovated them for the purpose of a vocational evaluation center, staff, and operation. Vocational Technical Education has provided all of the equipment for these centers which has amounted to over a half million dollars. Many handicapped students going to Area Vo-Tech schools have been evaluated through these centers as well as the evaluation of numerous mentally retarded students through the years.

2. Following extremely successful I&E projects with the Moore-Norman Area Vocational-Technical School, a cooperative agreement was developed whereby MNAVT School provided 10% of the funds which were applicable to in-district deaf students and VR provided 40% of the funds for out-of-district deaf clients in training at MNAVT. Moore-Norman and VR contributed State funds to match 50% Federal funds from Vo-Tech, whereby 27 vocational programs were opened to the deaf at Moore-Norman.

The funding program provided interpreters and special reading and math instruction.

3. As a result of the cooperative programs, Oklahoma State University Technical Institute and East Central State University entered into a shared funding agreement whereby interpreters were provided at the two institutions fully opening these two schools to the deaf.

4. No formal agreement has been struck, however, full utilization, coordination of services and resources are in effect between our VR high school cooperative program counselors with numerous Coordinated Vocational Education Training (CVET) programs conducted by Vo-Tech throughout the State. The CVET program was primarily for ninth and tenth graders and is preparatory for Area Vo-Tech school training. Due to our relationships with the public schools and Vo-Tech, VR counselors have a large number of these students on their active caseload.

The above coordination and cooperation is indicative of the close working relationship that exists among three State agencies and the public schools in the State of Oklahoma and are to a very large degree a direct result of high school cooperative work-study programs originated some twenty years ago. Coordination, cooperation and open communication, as well as the necessary financial funding is needed for the continued success of these programs as they provide the necessary services for preparing these handicapped students for the world of work.

There have been no formal follow-up studies done regarding the Work-Study programs across the State of Oklahoma. The students remain on the VR counselor's caseload until they have been satisfactorily employed for the required 90 days in work that is compatible, and then they are closed in status 26 as successfully rehabilitated. We have no tracking system for these closed cases unless they are placed in a sheltered workshop at the time of closure.

In 1977, the Enid High School Teacher Coordinator, Jimmy Christal, did an informal follow-up on the graduates of their program for the past 10 years. He found that only six of these graduates were unemployed. This is a 95%+ employment rate. John Musser, Vocational-Technical Follow-Up Counselor, Alden Fowler, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, and Jimmy Christal, Special Education Teacher conducted a more formal follow-up study for the Work-Study graduates from 1975 - 1981. Of the 77 graduates during this period of time, 62 are employed in a variety of jobs in Enid. The breakdown for the 15 students not employed in Enid is as follows:

7 moved and information could not be obtained;
5 were too severe for competitive employment;
1 was deceased and only
2 were "not working".

This is an excellent report. It may not be totally indicative of all programs, but it is believed that a follow-up in any of the programs across Oklahoma would prove the program to be <u>extremely</u> cost-effective and, these students are receiving a much needed early intervention of vocational rehabilitation services.

The curriculum for the Work-Study program which was developed at the beginning of the program is still used as a basic guide for the teacher-coordinators. Computational skills, communicative skills and life survival skills are included in this curriculum. The changing employment picture determines the "how" and the teacher's unique method of instruction, however, the basic concepts remain the same, i.e. interviewing skills, application completion, employer-employee relationships, peer relationships, dress codes, etc.